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The Right to Freedom

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Leader of the BPF Vincuk Vyachorka (on the left) meets Anatol Lyabedzka, deputy chairman of the United Civic Party, after latter's realease from prison. *(Anatol Lyabedzka's interview read on p.3)*

Be jealous, Russians...

Aleg Mironaw, Russian representative on Human Rights was satisfied with his visit to Belarus and with the state of Human Rights in our country...Even Lukashenka did not expect this

It was a strange visit... It seemed that the chief official defender of Human Rights of a neighbouring country came in the right moment. His aim was understandable; to see the Human Rights situation in our country with his own eyes. He came after the images of militiamen beating participants of the Freedom March were broadcasted on all television channels, after hundreds being arrested in Minsk and after the speech of Lukashenka in Russian parliament. He could not know about the political prisoners and about the famous politicians who disappeared. And what did he do at the beginning of his visit? Yes, met with Lukashenka. Then he met with the chief of the Supreme Court who was appointed by Lukashenka and with the head of the lower chamber of Belarusan parliament; he also met with students and teachers of the Belarus State University...

That is all. Meetings of Russian representative on Human Rights with those whose rights are violated were not included in the program of his stay. He also did not visit Belarusan Human Rights organisations and the Human Rights movement leaders...

Nevertheless Aleg Mironaw got an idea about the state of Human Rights in Belarus (probably he had it before his visit). At the first day of his stay he declared that the situation with Human Rights in Belarus is much better than the situation in Russia...

Be jealous Russians, be proud Belarusans... Of course we have something to be proud of. We do not have national conflicts and there is no civil war in the country... as well as there is no freedom of speech, no freedom of demonstration etc...

Lukashenka was very grateful to the communist Human Rights defender. He even offered him the position of Belarus Human Rights representative. Lukashenka promised to make this proposition during the next meeting of the union parliament. We have arrived, as they say.

Nevertheless, knowing about Aleg Mironaw's visit to Cuba and his delight with the Human Rights situation on the «island of freedom», his actions in Belarus are not surprising.

Andrey NALIVA

Chronicle

On 31 October, militiamen detained some people gathering on Yakub Kolas Square who was going to march to Moscow-cemetery and then to Kurapaty (small village outside Minsk, where about 150.000 people of diffe-rent nationalities were executed during Stalin rule) to mark the Ancestors' Remembrance Day known as «Dzyady». Militiamen dragged people with flowers into cars drove them away from Yakub Kolas Square and threaten promising to put them behind bars if they would go to the cemetery. One of the detained, member of the Belarusan Popular Front, Ales Shypko told, «I was put in a militia van for transportation of prisoners. There were five more people in a car together with me. Although there were some sectors in a car they put us all into one. My «colleagues» were plump people and there were not enough places for all of us in a car. One woman felt unwell. She cried that she had a diabetes and must to take insulin or otherwise she would die. But militiamen didn't hear anything and only when this women felt very bad and almost lost consciousness they threw her on the street. They kept us in a car for forty minutes. Then they drove us for half an hour around the city and then they took us to Savetski Administration of Internal Affairs where they kept us one hour more motivating our detention by necessity to clear up our personalities. Then they wrote explanatory note, offered me to sign it and then released.»

In October, democratic non-governmental organisations and associations of Brest region made protest against Belarus and Russia's unification. Corresponding resolution and appeal were adopted by the second regional Assembly of representatives of non-governmental organisations, which took place in Brest. The authors of appeal and resolution called everybody who «shares principles of freedom and democracy to say decisively «No» by means of different forms of protest to attempts aimed at cancellation of Belarus sovereignty and independence.

(to be continued on p.p. 6-7)

Address

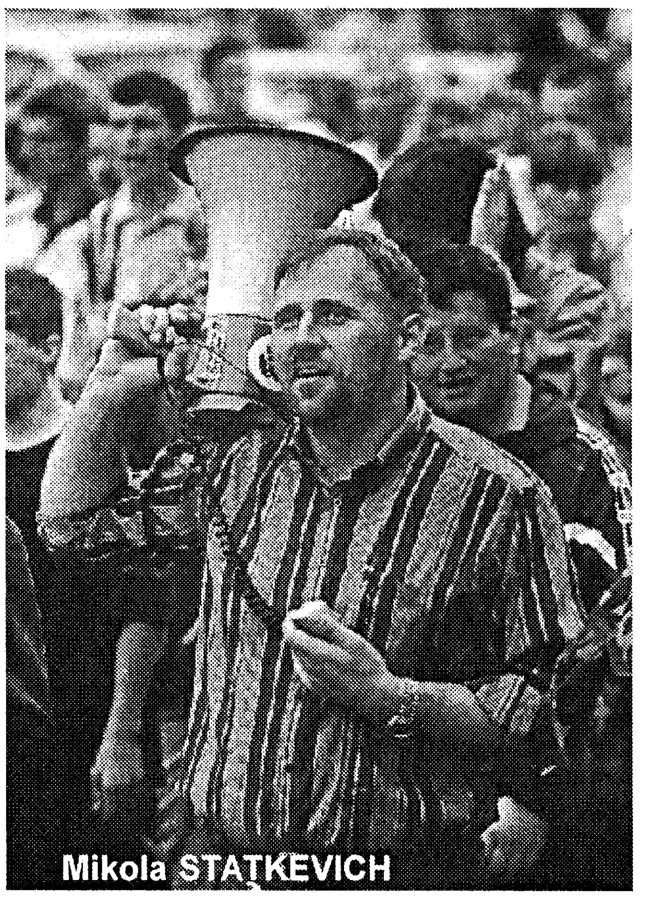
of political prisoner Mikola Statkevich to the citizens of the Republic of Belarus, written after 12 days of hunger-strike in Minsk isolator

Everything in this world costs us as much as we are ready to pay for it. And this prise might be money, work, time, personal freedom or... life.

Our people only then appreciate Freedom at its true value when there people capable of paying the highest prise for it will appear. Enough words! We've seen too often as those who told the best words about Freedom was not able to run risks. Only examples of struggle and sacrifice give birth to new fighters for Freedom.

Belarusan patriots, who on 17 October came out to Freedom March, got through the strikes of militia truncheons, ill-treatment in militia vans, terror of Lukashenka's torture-chambers paid high prise for their striving for Freedom. By this they raised the value of Freedom in the eyes of compatriots. One day Belarusan people will call with respect and honour the names of those who stood up for Freedom on 17 October.

Way to Freedom is impossible without struggle, torments and hard work. But we and even our children will never see Belarus to be free and flourishing country if today we don't take the path of Freedom.



Mikola STATKEVICH

Struggle Goes On...

Leader of Belarusan Social Democratic Party «Narodnaya Gramada» Mikola Statkevich was released on 31 October given writing undertaking not to leave the country. Next day there was held a press conference where Mikola Statkevich informed journalists about as follows

«There are 6,000 people imprisoned before trial in isolator. To my mind about 70-80 per cent of them can be released straight now (they are kept in custody for such small items!)

There were 16 people per 10 places in a custody cell where I was kept. People slept in turn, but I was given a separate bed (incredible luxury in those conditions) because people respected myself very much. Though administration of a custody centre was subjected to pressure of state authorities it was not hostile to my personality. But there were indirect attempts to pressurise myself through my cell mates. They kept my cell mates in «penal» for one hour (a room one meter long by one broad) then they called them out and forced to write explanatory notes that they did not force me to go on hunger-strike. When they refused (it's a nonsense – a man has come here to go on hunger-strike and he does it) they were told that I complained of them. But after all of them came back to the cell they gathered together, discussed this situation and then informed myself that custody administration wants to stir up them against myself. My cell mates asked whether their company suited me or not and whether I was ready to share custody cell with them. My answer was «In principle everything is OK!» After that they said «they would never give in and they would fight for me»... After one week of my hunger-strike my cell mates were ready in sympathy with me to go on hunger-strike too and «to stir up custody centre».

I was transferred from this cell into another one, which was very strange. One could hardly call it a lock-up. It was much worse. In fact it was former lavatory... I was kept there for 3-4 hours and then transferred into another cell of 6 square meters size meant for two people. There was a strict control in this cell – each five minutes they observed what was going on inside the cell through an inspection hole. What did they want to see? Whether I died or may be I was eating something?

It has been my second hunger-strike. The first one was while I was kept on Akrestina St. At that time I was released ahead of schedule. But this time I was prepared for long-term hunger-strike. I thought that by means of one month-long hunger-strike I could set for the authorities a task what to do when a man exhausted from hunger has one foot in the grave: let him die, in essence to kill him, or set him free. I thought it was the only chance left for me to be released then.

They threaten me by forcible feeding. But I stated that in case of any violent action toward me and any ill-treatment I would write a letter and a copy of it I would hand over to my lawyer. The sense of this letter would be as follows: I am going to put up resistance to any violent action (if any) including forcible feeding; and if my heart stops as a result of this struggle people who carried out violent actions must resume responsibility for it. Such a statement affected medical staff. And all the talks about forcible feeding stopped immediately.

On Sunday around 10 o'clock in the evening I was told to take all my belongings and led to the orderly officer. There were people in civil and a doctor. They said, «investigator believes that you are not going to run away and hide yourself until court hearings». I know for sure that investigator did think so earlier.

Then I had a talk with a man in civil (as I understood it was one of the heads of a custody centre) who said that on Sunday at 7 o'clock in the evening prosecutor made a decision to set me free until court hearings. He asked my exact home address and home telephone number and then dialled it. Then he asked my daughters to be at home because in half an hour they were going «to hand something from your father». Then they put me in an ambulance van, took me to the home, led to the door and handed over to my family. They explained their actions, «You know, people are disappearing. That's why we wanted to prevent any problems and questions and handed you over to your family in such a way».

The reasons of my release, I think, were following. The regime is left no way out but negotiations with the West and opposition (Lukashenka's dreams of tsar's crown are not already on agenda any more). Besides, while I was serving my imprisonment before trial Belarusan rouble had next in turn fall down. It means that foreign investments in country's economy are needed. Summit of the Organisation on Security and Cooperation in Europe in Istanbul is going to be held soon. International organisations showed sympathy with detained people and pressurised Lukashenka. I know that another political party was preparing for an action for my release (it would take place after 15 days of hunger-strike). It was my decision. It was possible to pass it from custody cell. I am very glad other people participants of the Freedom March are also released.

During the march I did my best to prevent demonstrators from clashes with special militia troops. I managed to persuade people to go back. Believe me it was very difficult to do it because there were a lot of young people who were prepared for anything. I've seen such a resolution to struggle for the first time for last several years.

The authorities are in panic. Public is ready from passive discontent to pass to the active protest. I failed to prevent clashes at the very beginning. But when I managed to do it and unsatisfied people began to move away special militia troops stroke at people's back... Young people who began throwing stones rescued the rest people from beating (they gave them possibility to move off). It's a sin to charge them for clashes. It's simply an adequate man's reaction: when they beat defenceless people it's quite natural for man to protect them and defend oneself.

Indeed, there were severely beaten people. In this situation I couldn't leave my country. I think I bear moral responsibility for the events which took place on 17 October in Minsk. I asked to take me to the party's headquarters and there I waited for the arrest. To share the fortune of the detained and arrested people and to go on struggling in order to draw public attention to this problem was everything I could do in that situation...»

Palina STSEPANENKA

Anatol Lyabedzka

«Freedom March-3 will be after Freedom March-2...»

After the October Freedom March the deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation Anatol Lyabedzka became not only a political prisoner but also an object of an international scandal. The special observer of the Organisation on Security and Cooperation in Europe on Belarus Adrian Severin compared the arrest of Anatol Lyabedzka with his own arrest in his talks with Lukashenka. Our talk with Anatol Lyabedzka lasted only fifteen minutes, just before he was flying to Amsterdam and then to Istanbul. At the moment of the interview many points concerning Belarusan problems that might be discussed during the summit in Istanbul were not clear...

— Mister Lyabedzka, can you tell what you expect from the summit in Istanbul?

— The Belarusan opposition settled three aims before the summit of the OSCE in Turkey. The 1st one is to create an isolation field around the former president Lukashenka, we mean to make him have as less contact as possible with the leaders of the other countries. The second aim was to hear the problems of Belarus, especially the Human Rights situation in reports of the leaders of several countries. One more aim was the presence of the delegation of the Supreme Soviet in Istanbul during the summit. At the present moment I can say that I achieved all three aims.

— There will be a state delegation of Belarus in Istanbul. Can we expect any negotiations or meetings of the opposite sides during the summit? Will the presence of both sides help to free political prisoners?

— First of all, the Sazonaw-group has nothing to do with the summit as well as the delegation of the political parties. I exclude the probability of negotiations. It is impossible, taking into consideration that only one meeting is planned. It will be a dinner to which the representatives of political parties and the Sazonaw-group would be invited. I will also be at this dinner in spite of the fact that I am the only member of the delegation of the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation. All the other meetings of the official delegation and of the opposition will be separate. At the last meeting of the consultation union of political parties we agreed that it does not matter where the negotiation process will start, the main point is that it can not start before all the promises made before will be fulfilled. It means that the representatives of the political parties can not start the negotiations.

— You are going to the summit after ten days imprisonment after the Freedom March, was it your first imprisonment? What was the most striking thing there?

— It was my second imprisonment. Once I was arrested and put in jail for three days. I have an impression that nothing has changed in Belarusan prisons. They look the same as 20-30 years ago, the same rules, and the same atmosphere. For example, the prisoners received their food according to the rules settled in 1929. I see this as a symbol. Life is regulated by the rules settled in Stalin-times. What we need to do is to change rules of prisons. The authorities should understand that people who sit there are citizens of our country. These are people, not beings with two legs that can be tortured and humiliated. I think we should reform these institutions.

— You are one of the first politicians who said that after the Freedom March there would be Freedom March-2 and Freedom March-3. How do you see these actions?

— Yes, I am absolutely sure about this. The Freedom March-2 will be well organised and more people will take part in it. I think we can speak about this thinking about next year. We give a small chance to the people in power in Belarus. If they do not start the negotiation process the next Freedom March will take place in February or March. As for the nearest plans three political parties applied to receive permission to organise a protest action. We also applied to receive permission to organise an action of protest on the 24th of November, it will be the anniversary of the coup d'etat. We plan to organise mass pickets; it will be an action of peaceful opposition against the authorities. We ask people to come with candles.

— How do you assess the agreement of the opposition and the authorities about the access of the opposition to the state mass media?

— Right now we have only declarations, we shall see how this agreement will be carried out in reality. A journalist asked mister Dzmitryew, the presenter of the TV-program «Political dialogues», if he is going to make a program with me or with Statkevich. He did not know anything about this, though Belarusan television is advertising a program with the opposition leaders. I think this is just the advertisement of the agreement with the opposition before the meeting in Istanbul. I think we can assess the real value of these agreements only after the 20th of November when the summit is over.

Tatsyana SNITKO



Uladzimir Charnow

This is a fascism...

An open letter to the Belarus minister of Internal Affairs, General-lieutenant Y. L.Sivakow from the lieutenant colonel in reserve U.S.Charnow

Dear Yury Leanidavich!

You got into contemporary history of the still independent Republic of Belarus. Maybe Lukashenka will even honour you and the militiamen who «suffered», but by fulfilling a bloody order and by the creation of Bloody Sunday on the 17th of October you have put great sin on your soul. Some time later the parents of the participants of the meeting as well as the parents of the militiamen who were injured will curse you and just as Pinochet you will face the court of justice.

In 1990 when I was the commander of the troops in the Caucasus in Kabardino-Balkaria I was asked by the president of this republic, V.M.Kokov if I would obey the orders from Moscow and break up demonstrations as it happened in Tbilisi. I answered that during my service in this republic I made lots of friends and they might take part in this demonstration. Only if they surround the territory of the military base with weapons in their hands and shoot at least one soldier I will give the order to open fire...The meetings took place day and night but there where no victims in Nalchik in that fortnight. It was not my native people. And what do you do with your own people? Why do you hate us so much? You have been in service here for so long, beginning with Baravuha-1. Do you think that at the end of the 20th century you can kill and wound people only because they have a different opinion about culture, language and future? We do not want to be a Russian province and you put us in prison and torture us for this?

Why did you agree to this provocation? It was obvious from the very beginning that you can not put Belarusan people into reservation. Today you allow people who do not agree with Lukachenka on the place for walking dogs and tomorrow you will allow to gather only somewhere far away from Minsk. No. It will not happen!

This is why the participants of the Freedom March walked along the main street. They walked peacefully with no weapons, stones or sticks. There was no shop-window broken, no car destroyed along the 5 kilometres that 30.000 people walked to the place of provocation. They would have approached the Independence Square, have a meeting and go home.

It was so on the 21st of July. The participants of the demonstration met the row of militiamen, turned to the Kastrychnitskaya Square, had a meeting and then went home. It would have happened this time as well...

The participants of the march turned from the militia cordon and did not go to Bagdanovich Street. After that the participants did not react on the provocation and did not turn to Victory Square. But you needed the glory of putting down the rebellion and you gathered 3.000 well-trained soldiers armed up to the teeth. You wanted to give a lesson to those who think differently. That is why you prepared a provocation on Pershamayskaya Street. The Belarusan television does not show this. When the militia buses cut 500 participants of the Freedom March of the main stream, and the bridge over Svislach River was blocked, the militiamen received the order to fight. They started to capture the participants of the march and to beat them.

For our common sorrow the stairs of the ice palace in the Gorky Park were rebuild and there were piles of bricks lying there. It was the defence weapon of the march participants. This point you had not taken into consideration. It was not the opposition that brought the bricks there. It is horrible even to imagine how many victims there would have been if the president did not like hockey so much and they were not repairing the stairs...

Moreover I declare that Lukashenka, as Hitler in 1937, dismissed the officially elected parliament, created his own one and his own security system based on the militia troops that can be compared with the Gestapo. He created it all to eliminate those who think differently. The representatives of these militia troops copy Gestapo in their way of tortures and humiliations they use against their nation. We (62 people) felt it on our skin the night of the 18th of October. The militia of the Partyzansky District treated our group of 15 people being arrested that night in the following way.

At 6 o' clock in the morning soldiers of Special Militia Troops came to the militia department of the Partyzansky District where we were kept. While shouting they pushed us into the bus that was standing outside, beating us with sticks and fists on the way. There were two girls among us; they were treated even more cruelly. People who were half-asleep were beaten one by one. Moreover people were beaten by 7 soldiers at the same time. Later they put people one on another in the bus, girls on top. They did not stop beating people on the heads, though I told them that I was a journalist.

The soldiers spitted on people, tried to piss on them and threatened to severely beat the men and to rape the women. When the people lying underneath started suffocating the soldiers shouted that they would take everyone to the forest and bury them alive as they would bury any member of opposition who is against Lukashenka.

While the bus was driving they made the women sing the song «V trave sidel kuznechik». They made the men who were lying on each other sing this song too, but we could not even breathe. They started to jump on the people lying in the bus. Those who could not sing were beaten with sticks. After a hard blow on the head I lost my consciousness. The soldiers pulled me out of the pile of people, two of them pushed my hands behind my back and the third put his stick in my mouth and was tur-



ning it there. They let go of me when they thought that I was dead. I was beaten and tortured, though they knew that I am a journalist of the newspaper «Grazhdanin i zakon» (citizen and the law). Then they ordered everyone to squat and they were shouting again that they would take us to the forest and kill us. They forced the women to do a strip-tease and using the dirtiest slang they were offending us and the politicians of the opposition. A young woman Volga Bar'yalay (26) was also tortured, though they knew that she has 3 small children. They put her on the floor, pushed 3 men on top of her, kicked her in the head and demanded that she will never go to a demonstration again.

When I said that I know someone from their commanders they said that Sivakow is no one for them. They accept only Lukashenka. Then I understood that this is fascism. This is a gang of criminals and recidivists and you as a former commander of the Internal Troops should understand how dangerous they are. They could bury Zaharanka, Vinnikava, Ganchar by order of the president and they can bury alive any of us. We were beaten till the trial; even the judge Trubnikaw who was leading my case did not pay any attention to our complaints.

I am very sorry that I write with such delay, but I have just left the prison. All the participants of the march who had signs of severe beating were hidden in prison for 3-15 days. Everyone was judged by the «most human court in the world» without defender, lawyer or any other formality. Please think, Yury Leanidavich, would you like to be in my place? I will say that as officers we graduated from different academies and our professional roots never met, you tried to humiliate me and other citizens of Belarus with the actions of your soldiers.

All the victims applied to the prosecutor's office showing these signs of beating and applied to different Human Rights organisations and to the UN commission on tortures.

We demand:

1. That an official inquiry will be started to find the ones who took part in the tortures of people in the militia department of the Partyzansky District on the 18th of October. We are ready to take part in the investigation and to identify the torturers.
2. That the policy of training special troops to break up demonstrations will be stopped.
3. We demand that you find the courage to resign, as you did not manage to prevent mass beating. We demand that you protect us from the attention of the militia and the Intelligence.
4. The results of the investigation of the crimes committed by the soldiers of the special troops will be made open to the public.

Uladzimir CHARNOW

The letter was signed by other victims of the authorities that suffered on the 18th of October during the Freedom March in Minsk.

U.Charnow has not received an answer to his letter yet.

SUCHDIFFERENT HOLIDAYS,

OR INDEPENDENCE SQUARE TO ONES, AND KURAPATY TO OTHERS...

We live in the country of nonsense...

Only in Belarus the date of the October coup d'etat of 1917 is a national holiday. Lukashenka appointed this holiday. At the same time Lukashenka cancelled the national Remembrance Day «Dzyady» that is celebrated on the 2nd of November. But the logic of life always wins. One can not forbid a real national holiday and one can not force people to celebrate the artificial one...

That is what happened this year. Minsk City Executive Committee did not authorise the opposition organisations to have a demonstration and meeting devoted to Dzyady holiday. They only allowed a meeting in Kurapaty where Bolsheviks were killing people in 1930s. At the same time Minsk City Executive Committee allowed to hold a demonstration on Skaryna Avenue and a meeting on the Independent Square on the 7th of November.

Surprisingly everything was done according to the law. According to the last decree of Lukashenka the state organisations are allowed to do things that the opposition would be fined and arrested for (such as actions near underground stations, actions that interfere with traffic etc). It was obvious that this time the authorities tried to beat the opposition by organising a big demonstration in the centre of the city on the 7th of November. They wanted to organise a demonstration much bigger than the Freedom March. In spite of the fact that the lists of participants of the celebrations were compiled a long time before the event, in spite of the fact that people were offered days off and a premium, the celebrations were a failure. People walked along the Skaryna Avenue with dull faces, the amount of the ones who actually came to the Independence Square was much smaller than the amount of people at the beginning of the demonstration. People listened to the speech of Lukashenka that was read by the leader of the communist party comrade Chykin and then quickly went home. It is important to emphasise the behaviour of Minsk militia that day. They were very happy and tried to encourage people by cheering them up. The militia orchestra was playing. Nevertheless the approaches to the building of the administration of the president were blocked. Why? This was a gathering of the supporters of the regime.

By speaking about the celebrations of the 7th of November we violated the chronological order of the events. Dzyady took place on the 31st of October.



People came to this holiday by the will of their heart and these are not just beautiful words, but the truth. Here the people who came were risking more than the people who did not come. The places where the participants of the celebrations were gathering (Yakub Kolas Square and Academy of Sciences) were full of militia. The potential participants of the celebrations were arrested from the very beginning. The militia was very aggressive and rude in its actions against the journalists. They took the film of the journalist of the Polish newspaper «Gazeta Vyborcha» Robert Kovalevski after he took a picture of a woman being arrested by a militiaman. The journalists of the Moscow TV-company «TV-Centre» lost their camera; the militia confiscated it.

This year the celebrations of Dzyady were not so big as they used to be. Even under the search of militia camera's people came to the place of the meeting. People put flowers to the graves of outstanding representatives of Belarusan culture on the Moscow-cemetery and had a meeting in Kuraparty. The celebrations ended with the usual arrests. Ten people were arrested.

These two holidays that are celebrated approximately at the same time were so different and it could not be otherwise in a country where nonsense is a feature of state policy. In the state where one person can decide which holidays should be and which ones should not be celebrated.

A.CHAS

Events Facts Comments

(Beginning on p.1)

On 1 November, Minsk City Executive Committee cancelled agreements on rent of space in metro. It was carried out with breaking of the established order. Minsk City Executive Committee deprived of works about 4.000 people – both entrepreneurs and employees. Entrepreneurs and employees set up primary free trade union organisation. On 4 October in the morning about 30 entrepreneurs (mainly women) gathered on the Square of Independence and then made for the office of Belarusan Organisation of Working Women based on Freedom Square. The militia didn't interfere and confined itself to observation.

On 1 November, former Prime Minister Mikhail Chygir's imprisonment before trial was prolonged yet for one month. M.Chygir was arrested on 30 April 1999 during the campaign of presidential elections in Belarus, which was declared by the 13th Supreme Soviet. It should be mentioned that M.Chygir was one of the candidates for presidential office.

On 5 November, United Civic Party together with Belarusan Popular Front «Adradzhennie» conducted a picket against unification treaty and formation of a Union State of Belarus and Russia.

On 7 November, priest of a Belarusan autocephalous orthodox church father Yan went on hunger strike in a settlement Pagranichny, Grodna region. This decision connected with local authorities refusal to register this church and to give a plot of land to build a church on it. Father Yan is going to be on hunger strike until local authorities register a parish and give a strip of land for building a church in a settlement Pagranichny. By this decision local authorities breached constitutional provision saying, «All the religions and denominations are treated equally».

On 8 November, Minsk city court considered a complaint by the editorial board of the newspaper «Naviny» and journalist Syargei Aniska against decision of the Minsk Maskowski district court. Let's remind that on 24 September the court of Maskowski district satisfied a suit brought by State Secretary of Security Council Victar Sheiman against newspaper «Naviny» and journalist Syargei Aniska particularly for publishing an article about V.Sheiman family's house in a village Padlipki «Who in the tower-chambers lives?» Court bound the newspaper «Naviny» and Syargei Aniska to pay off 10 milliard and 5 milliard roubles correspondingly as moral compensation for insulting V.Sheiman's honour and dignity. The court board consisting of Inna Yablykava, Galina Glukhouskaya and Alena Dulub considered aforementioned complaint lodged by editorial board of the newspaper «Naviny» and Syargei Aniska. Syargei Aniska disproved an assertion by V.Sheiman's representative saying that article published in «Naviny» influenced V.Sheiman mother's state of health and as though for this reason she was forced to go to hospital. Syargei Aniska produced evidence of another nature of V.Sheiman mother's decease. Journalist also drew court's attention to a sum of action which is $ 45.000 US. Having heard all the arguments the court collegium found no reason to disaffirm Maskowski district court's decision and left it valid. Editorial board of the newspaper «Naviny» is going to appeal against this decision made by Minsk city court but authorities in fact reached their aim – newspaper «Naviny» does not come out any more.

On 10 November, US state delegation headed by Harold Koh, US assistant secretary of State Department for democracy, human rights and labour. Representatives of delegation took part in international conference near Minsk on the efficiency of legal assistance and protection of lawyers. During two day stay in Minsk, Koh also met with the officials of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus, opposition leaders, officials of Foreign Ministry, and families of disappeared politicians and those who the United States considers political prisoners.

On 11 November, after two years of imprisonment front-rank farm manager of the most famous during Soviet times collective farm «Rassvet» (dawn) Vasil Staravoitaw was released from a corrective labour camp in Orsha. 75 year old Vasil Staravoitaw was arrested on November 11, 1997. It happened to him after Yawgen Mikalutski assassination, head of the State control committee for Magilew and Magilew region. Originally his arrest was connected with Mikalutski's assassination. He was charged together with former Minister of Agriculture Vasil Lyavonaw (who was also arrested) for financing and organising this terrorist act. But in late May 1999 he was convicted of large scale embezzlement, repeated bribery, concealment of profits, contraband and some other crimes and sentenced to two year term of imprisonment with property confiscation.

On 10-11 November, international conference on efficiency of legal assistance and protection of lawyers was held in Minsk. It was organised by the Human Rights Centre and Legal Assistance to the Population organisations. Well known politicians, lawyers, human rights activists from Belarus, Russia, Poland, England and the USA took part in work of the conference. The subject discussed is of extreme importance for Belarus, for here lawyers of principle and human rights activists face strict resistance from the authorities' part. There are a lot of examples proving it. Lawyers are deprived of licences (case of Gary Paganyaila and Nadzeya Dudarava); though there is a lawyer immunity during court sessions provided by the law criminal proceedings were instituted against Vera Stramkowskaya because of her demand to present material evidence (40 bottles of cognac seized from Vasil Staravoitaw). US assistant secretary of State department Harold Koh pointed out that the USA is aware of political situation in Belarus including that with human rights. The USA government is concerned about human rights violations in Belarus, said Harold Koh, and we are guided by the policy of «selective contacts» and this means



that the whole economic assistance excepting for humanitarian aid and some of educational programs are suspended. Harold Koh stated that Daniel Spekhard's back to Belarus does not mean normalisation in relationships between Belarus and the USA, it won't take place until Belarusan authorities make real steps towards democracy respect for human rights. During this conference V.Stefanovich, staff member, appeared with report about activity of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna».

On 11 November, country wide warning strike of market vendors was held in Belarus. The entrepreneurs demanded the limitations on trade introduced by presidential decree to be abolished. If these demands are not satisfied market vendors will go on unlimited strike from December 1, 1999.

On 12 November, Bangalor Square in Minsk saw a picket from a series «Belarusan Inquisition». It was devoted to the events of October 17, 1999 in Minsk - when lots of people were severely beaten and injured during and after Freedom March.

On 12 November, Ales Byalatski, chairman of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna» was summoned to the Minsk Central district court. He was charged with breaking the article 172 of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus (illegal manufacturing and spreading of published production). This means that the bulletin «The Right to Freedom» was published as though with a circulation more than 299 copies (only this number is permitted for editions registered in a set by the law form to be published according to the law on press in Belarus). Ales Byalatski managed to prove that in a charge sheet drawn up on 4 October after illegal search in the office of «Viasna» there was no information about number of confiscated bulletins, and that only another charge sheet which was drawn up in the Central Administration of Internal Affairs did mention the number of confiscated copies. As a result court hearings were postponed.

Informational department of "Viasna-96"

WE CAN HELP BELARUSAN PEOPLE NOW...

We've already recounted on the pages of our bulletin about co-operation between Swedish organisation Svenska Freds and Human Rights Centre «Viasna». As long ago as May 1999 it was decided to conduct joint seminar this Fall in Belarus with participation of local branches' representatives of Svenska Freds and those of «Viasna». It was supposed to establish more close relations not only with central office of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna» but with its local branches as well. So, the planned seminar was held on 6-8 November. The subject offered «Non-governmental organisation's stages of development» was of great interest. Belarusan part had a lot to study of Swedish partners' experience. Let's remind that Svenska Freds is the most experienced and biggest organisation for peace within Scandinavia. It was set up 116 years ago by the Nobel prize-winner Arnoldsen. One of the projects Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society has been working on now is expanding and extension of contacts with non-governmental organisations from East Europe (Belarus and Russia) aimed at joint work for the benefit of democracy in these and their co-operation with Western Europe. Our today's collocutor is co-ordinator of the «eastern» project Linda ISAKSSON.

— Miss Linda, will you tell us, please, a little bit about the activity of your organisation «directed eastwards»?

- Svenska Freds is a peacemaking organisation. After the end of the cold war it had to adjust to the new world. That's why different projects were launched with the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers. Our co-operation was established at the very beginning of the war in Chechen Republic. We tried first of all to support those wise women who set up their own organisation in the middle of Perestroyka already and for their children' rights. We believe this organisation can influence the authorities, for it is very important part of society. The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers gives help to men called up for military service and their relatives as well because the state is not able to cope with this task. Svenska Freds is not a human rights organisation but we do support such a projects.

— What have you done already regarding this direction of work?

— Joint project with Soldiers' Mothers is a communication of experience in terms of fund-raising, building an organisation, organisation's activities and may be the most important experience to communicate is how an organisation may influence the authorities and society as well. To achieve these purposes we held seminars inviting people from different cities and towns. It should be pointed out that non-governmental organisations always welcome moral support and assistance.

— How non-governmental organisations are financed in Sweden?

— We are financed by state, but our membership fees also cover some of organisation's expenditures. As far as Belarusan project is concerned it financed mainly by state. This decision was taken by the state organisation Forum Sud. So, Swedish authorities decided that our non-governmental organisations can help the organisations from Central and East Europe including Belarus.

— Do Swedish people know much about Belarus?

— No. Mostly we hear communications about strict state regime you have in Belarus. I think it is not enough. October events in Belarus were covered by our mass media but without comments. Swedish Foreign Minister advanced his opinion regarding these events by a press release. As Sweden is a member state of the European Union it refused to give any help to the regime in Belarus, but Sweden does not think it is necessary to break off diplomatic relations with Belarus. A book about Belarus and Belarusan people written in the Swedish language has recently come out for the first time. A well known journalist and writer Albin Abrahamsson is an author of this book. So, those Swedish people who are interested in Belarusan history and current state of things in Belarus have possibility to read it in the Swedish .

— Miss Linda, why are you personally interested in our country?

— The point is, when I used to study at the University in Upsa I had a subject about development of East European countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union. I even wrote a year work about Lukashenka's way to power. During my work on this subject I took an interest in the events that take place in Belarus. As we already co-operated with the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers I got information not only about Russia but also about Belarus. When the possibility of co-operation for Svenska Freds with Belarusan organisations appeared I did my best to implement this project. I think we can and we must help Belarusan people because later on it might be too late.

In fact our co-operation began after Miraslaw Kobasa's visit to Sweden and his appearance in Forum Sud. He said that «Viasna-96» is an organisation worth to cooperate with. This opinion was proved after my conversation with Ales Byalatski, chairman of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96». Our joint project was approved and got financing. Within the framework of our project we've already been to Belarus last autumn, representatives of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96» have visited Sweden this May and now we've conducted joint seminar. It is planned also to invite representatives of local branches of «Viasna» to Sweden next spring to co-operate and work jointly with local branches of Svenska Freds; then to visit some Belarusan cities where the branches of our partner organisation work. So, there are a lot of plans and we are going to work to implement them.

Interviewed by Tatsyana REVYAKA

Mikhail Kukabaka

Draft painting from life

«That what two diplomas of higher education mean in comparison to my not finished secondary» – I thought with jealousy and went on with my business.

Some time later I was called to the commander of the camp major Dalmataw.

— You started to write suspicious things. Different complaints…

I mentioned Marxist and looked at the major with curiosity. I tried to imagine him in the uniform of a major of the CIA but I didn't know what it looked like. I started to remember my complaints. The letter to the bishop of the Perm-region with the request to send a priest to make Christian rituals was all right from the point of view of the constitution. Then the letter to the bureaucrat on the question of religions with the request how I can fulfil my right on freedom of conscious according to the constitution. Then the complaint to the Supreme Court demanding a just decision, it was not violating the constitution. Oh, I forgot! I sent a request to send 300 of my own roubles to the radio «Freedom» as «an organisation that fights for democracy, peace and friendship between people». I had a very serious talk with me about this point. I was warned that if I send one more request of this type, I will be punished and my money will be send to the Soviet peace fund.

So, I was waiting for the continuation of the discussion without feeling fear, but all of a sudden the major asked:

— What is connecting you with prisoner B.? — He meant Marxist.

I immediately felt cold and unhappiness. Without waiting for my answer the major continued:

— Well, you will spend 6 months in prison, think about your behaviour, then we decide what to do with you, - he pushed the button under his table.

The guard came in and took me to camp prison. I was pushed in a cell, the door was closed, the key turned and everything was silent again.

«Well, Marxist was right, -I thought, looking around, — You can not escape from the CIA anywhere, even not in the Perm region.»

I decided to write about this episode of the camp life. Not for future generations, just for myself, to look at myself from a different angel. It is always useful to do this. I showed my writing to some of the people.

Philologist stopped his search in the field of French folklore, read it, smiled and said:

— There is something in it.

(Continuation, № 43-44)

The spy burst out in laughter and added:

— It served them right !— he hated all Marxists.

Marxist was making a resume of one of the works of Marx. He read my notes, smiled and gave me the papers back without comment.

Another Marxist smiled at first, then his mood changed and after finishing reading he repeated his famous thought about the neck of the working class on which the «sirs democrats» want to sit, this including me.

After this I came to the Writer and Journalist, they were not mentioned before. They were speaking about something. Writer was writing sad stories that were printed in thick Siberian magazines. This stories were very useful as the one who managed to finish them showed the presence of courage and will. Of course Writer was not put in the camp for his stories but for discussing stories of other people.

Writer was a person with high moral principals. He read my notes and asked:

— Why did you write it like this?

— To send it to «Crocodile», — I joked.

— Don' t you understand that you betray some of our comrades?

I felt a bit lost hearing such a comment and gave the notes to Journalist. Journalist was a very serious man; moreover he was an economist. Once he found in one of the libraries piles of diagrams and accounting reports on agriculture and showing unusual diligence he wrote a sad article about shadow economy. Radio «Freedom» liked the article a lot and KGB did not like it at all. Moscow court assessed the difference in tastes as 6 years of imprisonment and the author was directed to get acquainted with the economy of the Perm region.

Journalist read the notes and said:

— It is written in a funny way, but Barys is right. You betray the comrades.

— But there are no names here!?

— And is it difficult to guess who is who?

— But there are no secrets in here, — I tried to defend myself.

— And are you sure that they know everything you wrote about? Insisted Journalist.

I breathed in, folded the papers, put them in a plastic bag and put them in a hole in the floor. Journalist and Writer continued their talk.

But in a year time I remembered about my notes and decided to continue them.

It was the time of Perestroika.

I did not manage to write a couple of pages as they came to search. My notes were confiscated as anti-Soviet. I did not want to give up and went to the camp authorities.

— Can you please explain me what crime I committed? — I asked captain of the Mardowskaya department of KGB Yashin.

— I think there is nothing special here…

— Then why were the notes confiscated?

— You know, we have not changed yet, — admitted the KGB officer.

— Then get used to it, — I gave him a piece of advice.

But I did not continue my notes.

1987



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